

1609/3525.

A
L E T T E R

TO THE
REV. DR. NOWELL,
PRINCIPAL OF ST. MARY HALL,
KING'S PROFESSOR OF MODERN HISTORY,
AND PUBLIC ORATOR IN THE UNIVERSITY
OF OXFORD:

OCCASIONED BY
HIS VERY EXTRAORDINARY SERMON,
PREACHED BEFORE
THE HOUSE OF COMMONS
ON THE THIRTIETH OF JANUARY,
1772.

L O N D O N:

PRINTED FOR JOSEPH TOWERS, AT NO. III, IN
FORE-STREET, NEAR CRIPPLEGATE.

M.DCC.LXXII.

[PRICE SIX-PENCE.]

E. T. E. R.



REV. DR. J. E. L.

PRINCIPAL OF ST. MARTIN'S
KING'S COLLEGE OF HODGKIN STREET
AND PUBLIC ORATOR IN THE UNIVERSITY
OF OXFORD

THE HOUSE OF COMMONS
ON THE TWENTY-THIRD OF JANUARY
1868

LONDON:
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REV. SIR,

THE rank which you hold in so respectable an University as that of OXFORD, together with that eminence as a Divine which has occasioned your being appointed to preach before the House of Commons, have induced me to pay a degree of attention to your late Sermon, which would not have been excited by an ordinary composition of that kind. But the discourse of so learned a Preacher, addressed to an audience of so much dignity, seemed to claim more than common regard, and I therefore gave it a very careful perusal. I must, however, confess, that when I had perused it, the sentiments which I felt

for the Preacher were very different from those of respect. I found that your sermon contained passages of so pernicious a tendency, and so inconsistent with the principles of that free constitution, which is deservedly the boast of this country, as to merit the severest censure. This consideration has induced me to address you in this public manner, and to make some animadversions upon a sermon, which appears calculated for no other purpose but to propagate the most slavish principles of government, and to vindicate the most odious exertions of despotic power.

In the remarks which I propose to make on your discourse, I do not think it necessary to enquire, whether there was any very exact resemblance between the civil war in the last century, and the rebellion of Korah, Dathan, and Abiram, to which your text refers, and in the punishment of which the Supreme Being miraculously interposed. Should it appear, that the text is in no respect applicable to the purpose for which it was produced, it would not be a matter of any great consequence.

It



It would not be the first time that a learned Divine had adopted a text, which had no connexion with the subject of his sermon. But my accusation against you is of a higher and more important nature. I charge you with having prostituted your talents, by a solemn defence of tyranny before a British House of Commons; and with having advanced such sentiments and assertions on that occasion, as were unworthy of the meanest Englishman, inconsistent with the principles of our constitution, and an open insult to those representatives of the people, to whom your discourse was delivered.

In truth, I am surprized that any Divine, in this age, should have the effrontery to preach such a sermon before a British House of Commons; but still more astonished, that they should hear such sentiments without expressing their indignation! But what must be the astonishment of every intelligent Englishman, when he sees prefixed to this sermon, the thanks of the representatives of the people! It is reported, indeed, that they are since sorry for having

having testified any approbation of so extraordinary a performance; and undoubtedly they have sufficient reason for repentance. It may be said, perhaps, that few of them were present; and this was probably the case. But surely the Speaker, and a few members, must have been present; and I should imagine that even Sir FLETCHER NORTON, if he were awake during the time it was pronounced, must have been ashamed of such a sermon.*

IN a considerable part of your discourse, Reverend Sir, you have taken abundant pains to vindicate the character and conduct of King Charles the First, and to throw out the bitterest reflexions against those illustrious Patriots, by whom his despotic administration was opposed. An extract or two will serve to shew the spirit of your performance. Speaking of the civil

* Since the above was written, I have been informed, that the House of Commons have resolved, that their vote of thanks to Dr. Nowell for his admirable sermon, should be expunged out of their Journals. For the credit of the members of that Honourable House, I am glad to hear this. It is one of the best things they have done since their assembling.

war

war (Serm. p. 21.) you say, ' The object of
 ' contest was no less than the preservation
 ' or abolition of episcopacy and monar-
 ' chy; the conflict was long and doubt-
 ' ful; the event fatal; fatal to THE BEST
 ' OF PRINCES, who fell a victim to the
 ' rage of his *rebellious subjects*; fatal to
 ' the *guilty nation*; whose proud triumph,
 ' stained with the blood of their Sovereign,
 ' brought swift destruction upon them-
 ' selves, and lasting *infamy* upon their pos-
 ' terity.' P. 19. you say, ' It has indeed
 ' been frequently asserted, that this tem-
 ' pest was raised by other causes; that the
 ' despotic disposition, the arbitrary pro-
 ' ceedings, and the tyrannical government
 ' of the King, after numberless oppres-
 ' sions patiently submitted to, roused at
 ' length the spirit of an injured people
 ' in defence of their liberty and laws;
 ' that they had frequently applied for re-
 ' dress of grievances; had often petitioned
 ' for their rights, had used every method
 ' of persuasion and remonstrance without
 ' success, before they had recourse to those
 ' measures, which a sense of their injuries
 ' inspired, and necessity sufficiently justi-
 ' fied,

‘fied. But to every unprejudiced person
 ‘this *apology for rebellion* will appear as
 ‘groundless as it is *base*.’

I will not, however, be too profuse in my quotations, lest I should injure the sale of so curious a performance. But I will enquire a little into the conduct of the ROYAL MARTYR, as you are pleased to stile him; and then we shall be enabled to judge, whether the imputation of *baseness* properly belongs to the assertors of national liberty, or to the reverend advocate for tyranny at Oxford. A short view of some of the principal transactions of Charles’s reign, will render it easy for any man to form a decisive judgment upon this subject.

King Charles I. succeeded his father James in March, 1625. He called a parliament in June, the same year, who voted him two subsidies; but because they were unwilling to grant any more supplies, till they had obtained redress for some considerable national grievances, he dissolved them when they had not been assembled quite two months. And to prevent some
 of

of those gentlemen who had been active in discharging their duty to their constituents, from being elected to serve in the next parliament, he caused them to be appointed sheriffs; particularly that celebrated lawyer Sir Edward Coke, though he had been lord chief justice of the Common Pleas and the King's Bench. In February, 1626, Charles called another parliament; but gave great offence to the House of Peers, by arbitrarily committing the Earl of Arundel to the Tower without any legal cause, while the parliament was sitting. The Lords exclaimed loudly against this despotic behaviour of the King; but he at first paid no regard to their remonstrances, though he did at length unwillingly set the Earl at liberty. Neither could his majesty agree with the House of Commons, but because they had impeached his insolent and over-grown favourite, the Duke of Buckingham, and had remonstrated against his levying tonnage and poundage without parliamentary authority, he dissolved the parliament before they had passed a single act.

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After

After the dissolution of his second parliament, Charles being unwilling to call another, had recourse to very unwarrantable and unjust methods of raising supplies. Among other unjustifiable expedients, an illegal loan was exacted from the people, and many gentlemen of fortune who refused to comply with this unconstitutional imposition, were committed to prison; and persons of inferior condition, who refused to submit, were pressed into the land and sea-service. But as the King found these irregular practices were vehemently opposed, and did not produce so much money as he expected, in March, 1628, he assembled his third parliament. And as in the period between this parliament and the preceding, the liberty of the subject had been violated in a variety of instances, the Commons were desirous of some new law for better securing their rights. For this purpose the *Petition of Right* was framed; which was so termed, "as implying that
 " it contained a corroboration or explanation of the antient constitution, not any
 " infringement of regal prerogative, or
 " acquisition of new liberties." But Charles
 was

was extremely unwilling to pass this bill into a law, and made use of a variety of artifices to avoid it. But being desirous of obtaining some supplies, which the Commons were wise enough to withhold, till they had obtained some security for the preservation of their own rights, and those of their constituents, he agreed to give his assent to the bill. He did this, however, in a very unusual form, apparently with the view of rendering it the more easy for him to evade it. But both the Lords and Commons declaring their dissatisfaction at this, he at length passed the petition of right in the usual form. After this they granted the King five subsidies; but as they proceeded after this to remonstrate against tonnage and poundage being levied without parliamentary authority, he prorogued them for four months. He continued this prorogation to January, 1629, when the parliament again assembled; but finding the House of Commons still disposed to attend to the grievances of the subject, he dissolved the parliament without a single act being passed during the session.

THUS ended Charles's third parliament, and as he had found that those national assemblies would endeavour to maintain the rights of the people, and not merely be the instruments of his will and pleasure, he resolved to govern without any parliament. Accordingly he issued a proclamation, in which he declared, that he should account it presumption in any to prescribe to him the time for calling a parliament. And about the same time, some of those members of the House of Commons who had the most distinguished themselves in supporting the liberties of the subject, were in a most arbitrary and illegal manner committed prisoners to the Tower, merely on account of their parliamentary conduct; particularly, Sir John Elliot, Sir Miles Hobart, Sir Peter Hayman, Denzil Hollis, William Coriton, Walter Long, William Stroud, Benjamin Valentine, and the great and learned John Selden.

FROM this time Charles called no parliament for upwards of eleven years, and during that whole period his government was little better than one continued violation

lation of the rights of the people. The payment of ship-money was exacted; and such other methods of extorting money for the crown adopted, as were in the highest degree oppressive and illegal. Tonnage and poundage continued to be levied by the royal authority alone; and upwards of thirty knights, and great numbers of other gentlemen, were imprisoned for refusing to subscribe to an illegal loan. In the Court of Star-chamber, the High Commission court, and other arbitrary tribunals, the people were grievously oppressed; and the most severe, cruel, and unjust sentences, were passed on men for very inconsiderable offences, and on very trifling charges. In particular, the barbarous sentences passed on Prynne, Burton, Dr. Bastwick, Dr. Leighton, and John Lilburne, were contrary to every principle of law and justice, and repugnant to every sentiment of humanity. Under his majesty's two great favourites, the Earl of STRAFFORD and Archbishop LAUD, the people felt all the rigours of civil and ecclesiastical tyranny. In England, as Lord President of the Court and Council of the North,

North, STRAFFORD trampled on the most important rights of the people; and in Ireland, as Lord-lieutenant of that kingdom, he incensed almost the whole nation against him by his arbitrary conduct. LAUD, in the mean while, exercised so much unjust severity against those whose religious sentiments and mode of worship were not exactly conformable to the established hierarchy, that great numbers of worthy and conscientious persons quitted their native country for ever, rather than be subjected to such gross oppression,

IN this short sketch of some of the principal transactions of the blessed reign of the ROYAL MARTYR, transactions which in the event brought him to the block, I have mentioned no facts but such as are of the most public and unquestionable nature. Other very criminal charges have been brought against Charles the First, but I did not chuse to introduce any questionable facts. And those which I have produced, I will venture to say, even you, Reverend Sir, though His Majesty's *Professor of Modern History*, are utterly unable

able to disprove. And what I have offered, is, I apprehend, sufficient to demonstrate, that the charge of *baseness* which you have brought against the defenders of the opposition to Charles the First, can reflect dishonour only on yourself; and that, if there ever was a Monarch, who could with any propriety be said to deserve the crown of which he was in possession, in asserting that Charles I. was THE BEST OF PRINCES, you have advanced a solemn falsehood.

You intimate, that you do not mean to vindicate every measure taken by Charles and his ministers; though it is evident that you labour to defend them to the utmost. But, you say, P. 19, 20. ‘ To
 ‘ suppose that they were exempt from the
 ‘ common passions, infirmities, or errors
 ‘ of human nature, would be to forget
 ‘ that they were men: to pretend that in
 ‘ those difficult and perplexing conjunc-
 ‘ tures they exactly regulated every mo-
 ‘ tion by the even hand of justice and
 ‘ prudence, would be in effect to attribute
 ‘ to them a degree of perfection far be-
 ‘ yond

‘yond the reach of human wisdom, or
 ‘virtue, to attain.’ But, unfortunately,
 the charge against Charles the First, and
 his ministers and favourites, is, not that
 their administration was not completely
 perfect, but that it was essentially bad.
 Charles might certainly have avoided
 trampling on the rights of his subjects,
 and injuring and oppressing them in the
 manner that he evidently did; and yet
 have been far enough from such a degree
 of perfection as is “beyond the reach of
 “human wisdom, or virtue, to attain.”

As to your intimation, that his unjusti-
 fiable proceedings arose from the House of
 Commons refusing the supplies he wanted:
 surely their declining to grant those large
 supplies which he might wish for, or his
 extravagant courtiers think needful, could
 not give him a right to over-turn the con-
 stitution, or to act in diametric opposition
 to the rules of law and justice. The very
 idea is absurd. Unhappily, parliaments in
 later times have been too ready to grant
 the most exorbitant supplies, without ma-
 king the necessary inquiries whether such
 sums have been properly applied, and whe-
 ther

ther the people on whom they were levied were able to bear such burthens.

SPEAKING of the calamities occasioned by the civil war, P. 15. you say, 'In vain shall we look for the beginning of these evils from any real or pretended grievances, from any undue stretches of prerogative, from any abuse of royal power, those favourite topics upon which the *enemies of our constitution* so vehemently declaim.' I apprehend, that I have sufficiently shewn, that the people laboured under such a variety of grievances in the reign of Charles the First, as are fully sufficient to account for the opposition that was made to him, without having recourse to any other cause. And that the civil war may justly be attributed to the *real grievances* which then existed, to *undue stretches of prerogative*, and to *the abuse of royal power*. But I should be glad to be informed, what it is you mean by the phrase *enemies of our constitution*. Is it really your opinion, Reverend Sir, that the constitution of the English government is despotic, and that none but tame

and passive slaves, and the votaries of tyranny, are friends to the constitution? If the constitution of England be a free, legal, limited government, I can scarcely form an idea of greater *enemies of our constitution*, than those who have adopted such principles as are avowed by Dr. NOWELL.

You observe, P. 22. that when Charles's
 ' private instructions to his ministers and
 ' agents, his correspondence with his secretaries, his bosom sentiments communicated without reserve to his most familiar friends, and faithful servants, shall
 ' be laid before the public, they will have
 ' abundant reason to admire his abilities,
 ' to applaud his *integrity*, to praise his
 ' constancy and patience, to celebrate his
 ' unshaken attachment to true religion; to
 ' deplore his death, and REVERENCE HIS
 ' MEMORY.' You inform us, that these important papers are now printing at Oxford, and will make their appearance in the second volume of State Papers speedily to be published. But be assured, my good Doctor, that in whatever pomp these precious

cious relics may issue from the Clarendon Press, they will not produce those surprising effects you seem to apprehend from them. Unless the *actions* of your ROYAL MARTYR can be blotted from the records of History, no publication of *papers* will ever be sufficient to vindicate his character. Charles sometimes talked and wrote smoothly and plausibly; but the administration of this BEST OF PRINCES proved him to be a tyrant, and an oppressor of the people whom he was sworn to protect.

HOWEVER unwilling I may be to divert your attention from "the contemplation of those DIVINE VIRTUES which shone forth in the life and death of the ROYAL MARTYR," as you excellently express yourself, (P. 21.) I must take the liberty to observe, that there is a very obvious reason why the memory of Charles the First is so exceedingly dear to some assuming Churchmen. This BEST OF PRINCES was very ready to support the extravagant claims of the Church; and the Clergy in their turn were equally ready to support

whatever degrees of civil power his majesty might think proper to assume, however tyrannical, and however oppressive to the subject. So that between the King and the Clergy, the people were very sufficiently enslaved. His majesty would not suffer them to be masters of their own persons and property; nor did the Clergy chuse to leave them to the dictates of their own consciences, or the exercise of their own understandings.

You are pleased to observe of King Charles, (P. 21.) that ‘the tongue of slander has been able to cast no reflection upon his *royal virtues*, but what time and an impartial examination have already in a great measure obviated.’ Whether the *royal virtues* of Charles have suffered any injury from *the tongue of slander*, I will not take upon me to determine: this, however, I think, appears certain, that his *royal virtues* appear in no very advantageous point of view in the pages of impartial history. And the pernicious effects of his majesty’s *royal vices*, have reflected so much dishonour upon his character,

racter, that all the eloquence even of the present *Public Orator of the University of Oxford*, will never be able to remove it.

It is evident, from the most impartial examination of the reign of Charles I. that his government was unjust, oppressive, and tyrannical; and that it deserved to be opposed by all men, who had spirit enough to disdain a servile submission to lawless and despotic power. And such an administration as that of Charles, cannot be defended by any man, but one who is an enemy to the liberties of Englishmen, and the common rights of mankind. But, it seems, there are yet Priests remaining, in this part of the world as well as others, who would gladly support any system of civil tyranny, provided they may be permitted to have their share of that ecclesiastical dominion, which is so grateful to the imagination of aspiring churchmen.

AMONG other curious particulars in your extraordinary sermon, you have been pleased, Sir, to speak of the Nonconformists, in terms of which a Divine of any candour

candour or moderation would have been ashamed. The establishment of the Church of England, and the rise of the Dissenters, is thus described by your figurative pen. (P. 15.) ‘The *vine which the Lord had planted*, had no sooner taken root in the land, but an EVIL WEED sprung up under its shade, and interwove itself in its branches; checking the growth, and *blasting the fruit* of the tree which supported it.’ And P. 16. you thus characterize the Dissenters: ‘From the *affected gravity* of their deportment, the *gloomy cast* of their countenance, and their pretences to a more pure form of divine worship than that established in the church, they acquired the name of PURITANS; a *turbulent sect*, whose very principles were full of *rancour* and *violence*.’ But P. 22. your ardent affection for the memory of the ROYAL MARTYR carries you still farther. You observe, that “this day of public fasting and humiliation,” the 30th of January, ‘will fill us with a just abhorrence of the principles and practices of those *bloody-minded men*, who, under the *sanctified pretence*

‘ *pretence* of promoting the honour of God,
 ‘ committed *every cruelty* which their own
 ‘ *sullen religious malice*, or the *instigation*
 ‘ *of the Devil*, could inspire.’

It is not necessary to enter here into any particular vindication of the conduct of the Puritans. Nothing is more certain, than that great numbers of them were men of distinguished piety, and the most exemplary manners. And whatever their imperfections might be, the cruel oppression which they underwent from the crown and the bishops, will fully justify their joining with those members of the established church, who were solicitous to preserve the rights of Englishmen, in opposing the arbitrary government of Charles the First. The Nonconformists were treated with great cruelty by the influence and authority of the Prelates of the church of England; who were not content with persecuting them at home in the most rigorous manner, but in 1637, obtained a proclamation from your BEST OF PRINCES, to deprive them even of the miserable refuge of flying to other countries, where
 they

they might enjoy the liberty of worshipping God in that manner which their consciences approved.

As to what you have advanced relative to the Scottish Presbyterian Clergy, I must observe, that I think it not worth while to enter into any inquiry into their conduct, or to attempt any vindication of it. I know of no order of clergy, by whom any considerable degree of power has been possessed, who have not grossly abused it. I have the strongest aversion to ecclesiastical, as well as civil tyranny, whatever form it may assume. And if men must be oppressed by Priests, it is of little consequence whether they are stiled Presbyters or Bishops. I think, however, that if we were to attempt a parallel between the Pope and some Bishops of the Church of England, in the same manner as you have done between his Holiness and the Scottish Presbyterian clergy, the English prelates would not appear in a much more advantageous point of view, than their reverend Scottish brethren; if, without offence to you, I may venture so to term them,

them. It is at least certain, that the powers assumed by the English Bishops after the Reformation, were very far from being consistent with Protestant principles, and that their conduct towards those who dissented from them, was highly oppressive and unjust.

You talk much, Reverend Sir, of the importance of religion to civil society; and I am as much convinced as you can be, that a firm belief of the great truths of religion, has the strongest tendency to render men's conduct more virtuous and amiable in all the various relations of human life. But I am exceedingly mistaken, if such sermons as that with which you lately favoured the House of Commons, will in any degree promote the cause of piety and virtue. The regard which I feel for the interests of religion, makes me the more concerned when I see it disgraced by those who pretend to be its ministers; which must be the case, when they are employed, like you, in propagating sentiments equally false and absurd, and in the highest degree injurious

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to

to the rights of the community. Religion, naturally venerable, becomes the scoff of the ignorant and superficial, who are not an inconsiderable number, when they see its established teachers supporting the most pernicious opinions, if they are likely to contribute to their advancement, or to recommend them to the people in power. Real Religion is undoubtedly calculated to promote the happiness of society, and of every individual whose conduct is regulated by its precepts. But, gracious Heaven! what accumulated injury and dishonour has religion sustained, by the practices of temporizing and ambitious priests!

If you, Reverend Sir, could have the confidence to entertain the members of the House of Commons, who, you might reasonably suppose, were not utterly ignorant of the History of their own Country, with such a false representation of one of the clearest periods in the English annals; what ideas must you be supposed to communicate to the young gentlemen of the University of Oxford, should it ever happen,
that,

that, in consideration of your salary as *King's Professor of Modern History*, you should attempt to give them any instructions upon this subject! How much is it to be regretted, that any who are to be trained up to the liberal professions, should, at a time of life when wrong impressions are easily admitted, be under the direction of a man of your servile and ignoble principles!

AT the close of your sermon, you take occasion to pay a compliment to his present Majesty of a very extraordinary kind. You observe, that “the *bright resemblance*” of those PRINCELY VIRTUES, which “adorned the ROYAL MARTYR, now” shines forth in the person of our gracious “Sovereign.” How unhappy must it be for the people of this country, if there be any just foundation for your comparison! That Charles the First was a tyrant, and an oppressor of his people, is an undoubted fact. Yet to this prince, whose arbitrary conduct gave the justest occasion to his subjects to take up arms against him, you

have compared, and *seemingly* by way of compliment, King GEORGE the Third! But, in fact, it is hardly possible to suppose any thing more dishonourable of his present majesty, than that he should be an imitator of such an example, or that he should approve such iniquitous principles of government as are contained in your sermon.

IN truth, Reverend Sir, you must have formed an admirable opinion of the present Court and Ministry, as well as of the House of Commons, to suppose that a defence of the most bare-faced tyranny, would recommend you to their notice and favour. But however strong your aspirations after a mitre may be, it is possible that your late inimitable sermon may not procure one. Your character, as an avowed advocate for despotism, may be so strongly marked, that no minister of state may chuse to hazard his credit by so shameful a promotion. You may, perhaps, have carried the matter too far; so that, notwithstanding the present system of politics,

litics, your veneration for the tyrants of the House of Stuart, may possibly not advance your promotion under the government of a Prince of the House of Hanover.

BUT should it on the contrary happen, that those who are entrusted with the reins of government, should be so regardless of their reputation with the people, that, from their affection to your political system, they should nominate you to a bishopric; that circumstance alone would be one of the strongest presumptions, that they are solicitous to enslave the people of this country, and therefore ready to promote those men, whose principles will the best qualify them to be the tools of lawless power. But whether you are to continue in your present station, or ascend to a higher dignity, you have an unquestionable right to rank yourself with the most famous assertors of the divine right of Kings to injure and oppress their subjects; with the SIBTHORPS and the MANWARINGS of former ages.

WERE

WERE the matter in dispute between us an ordinary subject of controversy, or could I bring myself to imagine, that your labouring to propagate at this period such despotic principles of government, could possibly proceed from good motives, I should think an apology necessary for the freedom that I have taken. You are possessed of some degree of learning and abilities, which, when joined with your rank in a learned and antient university, seem naturally entitled to respect; and if that learning, and those abilities, were worthily employed, they would probably obtain it. But when learning or abilities are employed in the cause of despotism, they are intitled only to the contempt and detestation of mankind. And, in reality, I know no class of men less worthy of regard, than those pretending to be the ministers of religion, who, instead of employing themselves in promoting the practice of piety and virtue, shew themselves ready to sacrifice, not only their own characters, but the most important rights of that country to which they are a disgrace, in order to gratify

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gratify their own pride, avarice, or ambition.



I am, Reverend Sir,

Your, &c.

Feb. 28.
1772.

A CITIZEN OF LONDON.

F I N I S.

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